

DEATH ABOLISHED

A SERMON

PREACHED IN ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, TORONTO
on Sunday, 3rd March, 1889

IN CONNECTION WITH THE DEATH OF

GEORGE PAXTON YOUNG, LL.D.

PROFESSOR OF LOGIC, METAPHYSICS AND ETHICS

IN

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, TORONTO

BY

REV. D. J. MACDONNELL, B.D.

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Professor of Logic, Metaphysics and Ethics in University College, Toronto,

BY THE MINISTER,

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2 TIM. i. 10—"Our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the Gospel."

Two things are here declared to have been accomplished by Christ: first, *the abolition of death*, and, secondly, *the bringing of life and incorruption to light*.

I. What do these great words mean: "*Christ Jesus abolished death?*" Clearly, they do not mean that Christ has delivered men, or any portion of the race, from physical death, or from the pain of dying. Death comes impartially to all, sparing neither youth nor usefulness, leaving sad and stricken hearts in his path. Still, as of old, plague and pestilence, storm and hurricane, war and the legion of sicknesses, by which our bodies are wasted, are the instruments of Death. The life of the most devoted saint is no more secure against the attacks of this great enemy than that of the vilest reprobate. The best of men must die, sometimes in great agony. The Christian man will bear suffering in a trustful and patient spirit; but he can purchase no immunity from pain or death.

In the full consciousness that all this was going on, and would continue, Paul wrote these words: "*Our Saviour Christ Jesus abolished death.*" What do his words mean?

1. Christ has taken away "*the sting of death.*" "*The sting of death is sin.*" Death comes as a scorpion, and the sting with which it slays men is sin. Christ Jesus takes sin away, and, though death may still wear an ugly look, it is powerless to do any real hurt, because its sting is gone. It is the burden of guilt on the conscience that makes a man afraid to die. Looking back on the sinful past, he is afraid to meet God in judgment. His own heart condemns him. Christ removes the burden of guilt from the conscience. He reveals God, forgiving sin at the cost of the life of His own Son. The past is blotted out. The man is "*reconciled to God through the death of His Son.*" Being set right with God, all things are new to him. Not only is life full of new meaning, but death comes now to summon into the presence, not of an angry Judge, but of a loving and righteous Father. The sting of death is gone; it has no real power to hurt.

2. Christ delivers from the "*fear of death.*" "*Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He also Himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death He might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*" Of course, when the sting of death is taken away, the fear of it is also to a large extent removed. Yet, apart from sin, there is a terrible aspect about death. Death is negation, separation, darkness. It is the cutting off of the man from the world in which he has lived, and from the friends to whom his heart is bound. No more will his eye look on the beauty of earth and sky, or on the faces of loved ones; no longer will his ear be open to the sound of welcome voices; communion with the earth and its inhabitants is at an end. I do not know that any man

can fairly realize all this without some dread. There is the natural fear of the unknown. Even the Christian cannot help shrinking from death, as the patient shrinks from the surgeon's knife, or as the emigrant dreads the unknown dangers of a new land.

In large measure, however, Christ robs death of its gloomy and terrible aspect. He does so, for one thing, by bringing the blessedness of the future home of the soul so prominently into view that the soul is content to leave its earthly tabernacle. Though "*the valley of the shadow of death*" is dark, the very imagery used intimates that there is light beyond; for, if death casts a shadow, must there not be a brightness which it intercepts? The emigrant is content to leave the home of his childhood, and to brave the perils of the deep, when he is assured by a son or a brother in the new land that he will exchange poverty and hardship for ease and comfort. Though he may shed bitter tears as he takes the last look at the land that gave him birth, hope will be strong within him as he thinks of all that has been told him about his new home, and forms plans of life and work in the future. And so the Christian, keen as may be the pang when he is called to leave this home-like world, with all in it that has made life bright and good, will be sustained by the hope of a more blessed and glorious abode—the true home of the soul—"a better country, that is, a heavenly"—and will be ready to pass through the swellings of Jordan, assured that the "*Father's house*" is on the other side, and that the Elder Brother is waiting to receive him.

3. Christ *imparts a principle of life* to the believer, which is an earnest of the "life and incorruption" that shall be his in overflowing measure hereafter. The words spoken to Martha were spoken for us: "*Whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die.*" The resurrection life is begun already in the believer. A moral and spiritual resurrection has taken

place—a rising out of the death of sin into the life of righteousness—which is the pledge of the bodily resurrection. “*If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall quicken also your mortal bodies through His Spirit that dwelleth in you.*” In this sense, therefore, death is “abolished.” The physical death must come in the order of nature; but it is a beginning rather than an ending, a process of life rather than of death. It is the folding up of the shifting tent that we may take up our abode in the enduring mansion. It is the doffing of the beggar’s rags that we may don the princely robes. It is the shuffling off of the mortal coil of flesh that the life within may have room to expand and may receive from God a “*spiritual body*” which may be a fit organ for the renewed spirit.

In these senses, then, amongst others, Christ Jesus “abolished death.” He has taken away its sting, which is sin. He has delivered from the fear of it, by revealing the glory that is to be. He has counteracted it, and virtually conquered it, by implanting the germ of eternal life in the believer’s heart.

II. The thought contained in the first clause is expanded and stated in a more positive form when the apostle goes on to say “*and brought life and incorruption to light through the Gospel.*” Notice the expression, “*brought to light.*” It is not said that Christ Jesus was the first to propound the doctrine of the immortality of man, the first to teach that there is a life beyond the grave, but that He was the first to bring these truths into clear light. Men had had faint glimmerings of the truth before He came, but they had groped, comparatively speaking, in the dark. We have only to read the speculations of Plato, or the books of the Old Testament, to understand the force of the expression “*brought to light,*” as applied to Christ’s declarations concerning a future state as

contrasted with the guesses of the wisest heathen, or the faint hopes of Old Testament saints.

Let us ask more particularly

1. *What* it was that Christ brought to light.

2. *How* He brought it to light.

1. *What* did Christ bring to light? "*Life and incorruption.*" Not bare immortality. Not mere endless existence, which might be a curse rather than a blessing, and might be described as endless death rather than eternal life. What was the hope that heathen philosophers held out? That the human spirit, being of a different nature from the body, being uncompound and therefore not capable of being separated into parts like the material body, might continue to exist forever as pure spirit. Was there anything cheering in this hope? A spirit without a body, an inhabitant without a home, a being without organs through which he might come into contact with God's universe: can any of us tell whether that would be a blessed life or not? Might it not be a dreary and unblest existence dragged on through endless ages? Do not Paul's words express the natural feeling of human hearts: "*Not for that we would be unclothed, but that we would be clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up of life?*"

Not bare immortality, then, has Christ brought to light, but "*life and incorruption.*" Life of the highest sort, intellectual and spiritual; a life analogous to that which we now live, but with a renewed spirit in place of a sinful one, and a glorious, incorruptible, spiritual body instead of the body of flesh and blood; a life of ever expanding knowledge of God's works and ways and increasing delight in adding to its stores; a life of close and warm fellowship with kindred spirits bound by ties which no death shall dissolve; above all, a life of growing nearness to God and likeness to Christ, of endless activity in God's service and boundless joy in His presence:—such is the life which Christ has brought to light

through the gospel. Who does not see the contrast? Who will not say that compared with the brightness of this revelation, the speculations of human reason have been only darkness?

2. *How did Christ bring life and incorruption to light?*

(1) *By His teaching.* By His own words, which are spirit and life, and by the words of those who spoke and wrote as they were guided by His Spirit. Listen: "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*" "*Because I live, ye shall live also.*" "*I am the Resurrection, and the Life: he that believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die.*" Spake ever man like this Man? There are those who believe that these words were not spoken by Jesus, or written by John, but were concocted by some clever forger in the second century, who palmed off his own hallucinations upon simple-minded Christian people. Believe it who can! To us they are the words of Him "*in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden.*"

(2) *By His death.* "*We behold . . . Jesus because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that by the grace of God He should taste death for every man.*" "*That through death He might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*" "*Through death.*" It was the only way. If Christ was to redeem from the curse of the law, He must "*become a curse for us.*" If He would break the power of death, He must die. He did so. He tasted death for every man. In the act of dying He gained the victory over death, and now He says to every timid, but trustful soul, "*Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the Living*

One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

(3) *By His raising of the dead.* Once and again He gave proof that He held the "keys of death" by unlocking its portals and summoning back to human fellowship those who had passed beyond the reach of the voices of kindred. When He touched the bier at the gate of Nain and said, "*Young man, I say unto thee, Arise,*" and the dead man "*sat up and began to speak;*" or when to the man that had been dead four days He "*cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth,*" and "*he that was dead came forth.*" Jesus demonstrated that "those other living, whom we call the dead," have not really ceased to live. Little is told of them, or by them. The absence of information concerning the raised Lazarus is one of the most striking instances of the silence of Scripture.

"Where wert thou, brother, those four days?"

There lives no record of reply,
Which telling what it is to die
Had surely added praise to praise.

Behold a man raised up by Christ!

The rest remaineth unreveal'd;
He told it not; or something seal'd
The lips of that Evangelist."

(4) *By His Resurrection.* This fact is, after all, the corner-stone of our Christian faith and hope. "*If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain; your faith also is vain.*" "*But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of them that are asleep.*" That is to say, Christ was the first that rose from the dead to die no more. This was a new fact in the history of man. Lazarus and others had been restored, but only to see corruption again. Christ's Resurrection demonstrates the continuity of life in the unseen world. "*I am . . . the Living One; and I was dead, and*

behold, I am alive for evermore." "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death no more hath dominion over Him."

This fact is laden with blessing for the race. The Resurrection of Jesus does not stand apart as an isolated and altogether inexplicable phenomenon having no relation to the experience of ordinary men. Paul refuses to tolerate the views of those who accept the Resurrection of Christ, but deny the possibility of their own rising from the dead. "*We witnessed of God that He raised up Christ; whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither hath Christ been raised.*" "*But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of them that are asleep. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*" Not for himself only, but as the Representative and First-fruits of redeemed humanity, Christ is risen from the dead. And so, when we commit to the tomb our dead who have fallen asleep in Jesus, and when our doubting souls, thinking of the many who have gone without returning or sending any friendly voice across the chasm that divides us to assure us that they still live and love us, are ready to ask with Job, "*If a man die, shall he live again?*"—we will listen to the voice of the Redeemer of mankind as He comforts Martha with words that lighten the gloom of the sepulchre by the assurance that the dead continue to live: "*I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die.*

You know that in dealing with this theme I have had in mind the event which has occupied the thoughts of many throughout this land during the past few days—the death of Professor Young.

A great man—a great scholar, a great thinker, a great teacher—has passed from our sight. There is no exaggeration in saying that Professor Young might have filled the Chair of Mathematics, or that of Classics, or that of Oriental Languages, as ably as he filled the Chair of Philosophy. Papers from his pen which were published in the "American Journal of Mathematics" proved him to be one of the ablest mathematicians of the age. While the range of his scholarship was remarkably wide, his mind was not simply a store-house of much learning, but he was an original and profound thinker. Above all, he was a teacher—a prince among teachers—with a wonderful power, in the first place, of inspiring interest in whatever subject he taught and kindling enthusiasm on the part of his pupils, and, in the second place, of making his thoughts stand out in the sunlight, clear and luminous, so that the dullest might apprehend.

Many of Professor Young's contemporaries did not know how great he was, because he was so *modest*. He did not sound a trumpet before him, saying 'These are my opinions, listen and bow down.' His modesty was almost excessive. Many a time have I been made uncomfortable by his deference to my judgment on some matter regarding which I knew that he was a master while I was only a pupil.

One outstanding characteristic was his *intellectual honesty*. He was incapable of any sharp practice with forms of speech to bring them into apparent harmony with his thoughts. He would have no credit for views which he did not hold. It was his inability to give to the Westminster Confession the sort of assent which was expected by the Church that led to his resignation of his position in Knox College, and, subsequently, to his withdrawal from the ministry of the Presbyterian Church. On the same ground he declined to teach a Bible Class in this Church, or to act as an Elder when elected some years ago by a very large vote. When I urged him to

teach, his answer was, "I could not teach from the point of view which you and the Church would wish me to take."

Though thus self-excluded from office in the Church he loved—and no one that knew him would have dreamed of excluding him—was he not a genuine believer? Who among us doubts it? I would to God that all whose names are on our Communion Roll had the like faith in the Living God, the same desire to be conformed to the image of Christ!

It was in May, 1878, that Professor Young became a communicant in St. Andrew's. He did not bring a certificate of church membership, as he might have done; but he wrote in substance as follows: "If you and your Session will allow me to come to the Lord's Table, putting my own construction on the act, I shall be glad to profess in this way my purpose to live soberly, righteously and godly." Without question he was heartily welcomed to the fellowship of the Church, and he remained a consistent member of St. Andrew's, a most regular and devout worshipper, an almost painfully attentive listener, a generous supporter of the missionary and philanthropic efforts of the Church, until a few months ago when domestic considerations made it necessary for him to go to a nearer place of worship. He left us very reluctantly, and we as reluctantly parted with him, and he connected himself with the younger branch of this Congregation on Jarvis Street.

Is it not the case that as men grow riper, they allow many things to drop into the second place for which they once contended as vital? Professor Young had learned better than most of us to set the various elements of truth in their true relation to one another. Experience had taught him that "it is the simple things that are the great things." He kept always uppermost the great and weighty matters of faith in the Living God, love to God and his neighbour, trust in the Saviour whose death for sin he thankfully commemorated. We speak sometimes of the old man coming back to the

simple faith of his childhood. Yet the faith of the aged believer, while simple as a child's, has a strength and vigour which the child's faith cannot have. So was it with our beloved friend: he was no longer like the sapling, freshly planted in the garden of the Lord, but "*rooted and grounded in love strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.*"

Whittier's Poem "The Eternal Goodness" had a great charm for him and reflected largely his own feeling. He read it to a company of delighted listeners not long ago, reading, as he was wont to do, with much expression.

"O friends! with whom my feet have trod
The quiet aisles of prayer,
Glad witness to your zeal for God
And love of man I bear.

I trace your lines of argument:
Your logic linked and strong
weigh as one who dreads dissent
And fears a doubt as wrong.

But still my human hands are weak
To hold your iron creeds:
Against the words ye bid me speak
My heart within me pleads.

Who fathoms the Eternal Thought?
Who talks of scheme and plan?
The Lord is God! He needeth not
The poor device of man.

I walk with bare, hushed feet the ground
Ye tread with boldness shod;
I dare not fix with mete and bound
The love and power of God.

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Not mine to look where cherubim
 And seraphs may not see;
 But nothing can be good in Him
 Which evil is in me.

The wrong that pains my soul below
 I dare not throne above:
 I know not of His hate,—I know
 His goodness and His love.

I dimly guess from blessings known
 Of greater out of sight,
 And, with the chastened Psalmist, own
 His judgments too are right.

I know not what the future hath
 Of marvel or surprise,
 Assured alone that life and death
 His mercy underlies.

And so beside the Silent Sea
 I wait the muffled oar;
 No harm from Him can come to me
 On ocean or on shore.

I know not where His islands lift
 Their fronded palms in air;
 I only know I cannot drift
 Beyond His love and care."

It has occasioned no surprise to hear on all hands of Professor Young's wonderful influence over his students, and, especially, to learn that not in one or two instances, but in many, young men who had been tempted to agnosticism or infidelity had been brought back or kept from going astray by the influence of their great teacher's simple faith and beautiful life.

An old and dear friend came to see Professor Young after his stroke of paralysis. Standing a few feet from where he lay, she uttered simply the words "In the everlasting arms," and, though the power of speech was gone, the beautiful face was lighted up with a glow which bore witness to the response of the soul. When the grand, gentle spirit passed away, one who had been watching by him said that it really seemed as if there were a "cloud of witnesses" hovering about in the room. 'Imagination!' you say. Yes; but there is a blessed reality at the heart of it.

The scene in Convocation Hall was very impressive. The tone of the whole service was triumphant. Floral offerings were on this occasion at least appropriate. I could not help feeling, as I looked on the body robed in the academic gown which had been worn in the class-room, and saw the cap laid on the coffin-lid, as if some great military hero were being laid to rest. And had he not been a true soldier, inspiring men and leading them on in the battle of truth against falsehood, of reality against all shams and hypocrisies, of God and Immortality against all that would degrade and belittle humanity?

Our friend is fallen asleep, but only to wake to fuller and more glorious life. The scholar, the thinker, the teacher, the lover of truth, the child of God, has not ceased to live. "*This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and the mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY!*"

"So, when my latest breath
Shall rend the veil in twain,
By death I shall escape from death
And life eternal gain.

Knowing as I am known,
 How shall I love that word,
 And oft repeat before the throne,
 'Forever with the Lord!'

That resurrection-word
 That shout of victory
 Once more, 'Forever with the Lord!'
 Amen! so let it be!"

NOTE.

I take the liberty of appending an extract from an article by Prof. McCurdy which appeared in *The Varsity* of 2nd March. After discussing various features of Professor Young's character with very just appreciation, Dr. McCurdy writes:

"Of his more purely moral endowments the one that has impressed me most strongly is his *reverence*. This quality, so often missing from the make-up of scholars and thinkers of the second rank, was in him a natural corollary to wide and growing knowledge. It was, moreover, the key to what was most lovable in him—his simplicity, his tenderness and his magnanimity—since his reverence was felt for all that was good and pure and honest and lovely. It may not be out of the way for me to refer in this connection to his habits in regard to public worship. During the greater part of the latest years of his life he was never absent during the morning service from St. Andrew's Church, in this city, always walking to and fro the distance of over two miles from his residence. It was an actual help to devotion to see that grand old head and face, that countenance of wise humility, bowed with the reverence of simple child-like faith before the God and Father of all. But he neither found his religiousness in church nor did he leave it there. His devoutness was not of his life a thing apart; it was with him everywhere and under all conditions. He wore the aspect of one who was always worshipping, and so he helped others to worship what he himself loved and revered. This was in fact the highest and finest outcome of his life, the choicest result of the years that bring the philosophic mind. The sense of the being and presence of God was in him one with the sense of the reality potency and urgency of truth and goodness. His scholarship and his philosophy has this for their ground work and issue, and his sure and ample faith in what he thus sought and found shall perpetually remind us that in this way, too, *the pure in heart shall see God.*"

The following lines, written by an affectionate and enthusiastic pupil of the late Professor Young, and suggested by a few sentences in the foregoing sermon, may be appropriately inserted here:

"WHOM WE CALL THE DEAD."

"Those other living whom we call the dead
 From mortal body once whose spirit shone
 'And quickened it to beauty, have they gone
 To wandering loneliness 'mong shadows dread?
 From earthly house decayed hath each one fled
 A straying spirit, organless, and wan?
 Nay not unclothed is he, but clothed upon,
 In body new-create his light is shed.

And lo! our Brother-Friend awaiting stands,
 Who life and incorruption brought to light,
 To bring us to our house not made with hands,
 And in His presence there shall be no night;
 Who, who can fear to cease this faltering breath
 And be at home with God? And this is death!"

MARCH 3RD, 1889.

W. P. M.